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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 000678

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2013

TAGS: PHUM PREL GT UNHRC

SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN RESPONSE TO 59TH UNHRC DEMARCHE:

POSITIONS MAY CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

REF: STATE 64728

Classified By: Robert E. Copley for reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: In response to reftel points, MFA Multilateral Affairs Director Castillo told us Guatemalan positions at the UNHRC this year might differ from previous years. On Cuba, Castillo repeated that President Portillo would ultimately decide how the GOG will vote, but said the decision would take into account improved GOG relations with Cuba and recent U.S. decertification of Guatemala. On Iraq, Castillo said Guatemala is highly vulnerable to oil shocks and although the GOG understands that a peaceful solution may not be possible, it fears the negative repercussions of military action. On Middle East resolutions, Castillo said the GOG was concerned about perceptions from past UNHRC sessions that it is anti-Arab, and said votes at this session would be more "balanced." Foreign Minister Gutierrez will travel to Geneva after visiting Washington on Monday March 17. End Summary.

2. (C) Polcouns and Poloff discussed U.S. priorities for the upcoming UN Human Rights Commission with Ministry of Foreign Relations Director General for Multilateral Affairs, Ambassador Giovanni Castillo on February 13. Castillo said that the GOG shares the priority the USG places on human rights and agrees with many of our priorities at the UNHRC. He added that when we must disagree, we do so as friends. He used this opening to point out that we may find less agreement this year on Cuba, Iraq, and the Middle East resolutions. Castillo expressed appreciation for information on our positions but stated frankly that Guatemala did not have the personnel resources to focus on all the issues, citing the Zimbabwe resolution as an example.

3. (C) On Cuba, Castillo said the GOG has not yet decided on its position, which will be determined by President Portillo himself. Castillo pointed out that GOG cooperation with Cuba has improved markedly in recent months. He mentioned the Vice President's recent trip to the Island, the just-concluded Ministerial with Cuban Foreign Minister Perez Roque, and said that Portillo had received an invitation to visit Cuba. Castillo stated that these closer ties with Cuba were bound to have an impact on the President's decision, and added that the USG decision to decertify Guatemala on narcotics cooperation may also be a factor in the decision.

4. (C) On Iraq, Castillo said Guatemala hoped for a peaceful resolution, though he said this did not mean the GOG would oppose a military solution. He stressed that Guatemala understood that military action might be inevitable, and commented that the GOG is concerned about the possible economic impact of hostilities on Guatemala. Castillo said Guatemala is vulnerable to oil shocks and was already feeling the strain of higher prices.

5. (C) On the Middle East resolutions, Castillo said the GOG's position is evolving. He stated that the GOG was increasingly worried about the perception that Guatemala is anti-Arab and blindly supports Israel. Castillo said that Arab delegations at the NAM summit in Malaysia had exerted enormous pressure on the GOG representative to that meeting, and that the Guatemalan delegation had returned concerned that Guatemala is overly exposed on these issues. Castillo hastened to add that the Ministry had been analyzing its votes at the 58th UNHRC for some time. Castillo said that Guatemala had paid a high price for some of its earlier votes, and that its votes in the upcoming UNHRC would be more "balanced." Polcouns commented that Guatemala's record at the last UNHRC had been very positive, and had been noticed by many in Washington as forward leaning on promoting human rights in Cuba and the Middle East. This had earned the GOG significant recognition in Washington, and we hoped that the GOG could preserve that balance.

6. (C) Castillo identified North Korea as the issue where our interest most fully overlap. Pressed for other issues of interest to Guatemala at the UNHRC, Castillo said that three reports related to Guatemala are scheduled to be presented and added that the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants are of perennial interest to Guatemala. Castillo informed us that Foreign Minister Gutierrez would be traveling to Geneva for the opening week of the UNHRC. He also noted that the new GOG Ambassador Ricardo Alvarado would represent Guatemala at this session. Castillo indicated that President Portillo

trusted Ambassador Alvarado fully, and Alvarado would have significant discretion on many of the votes. He indicated that on the more important votes (e.g. Cuba, Middle East, Iraq), President Portillo was likely to make the decisions himself, in consultation with Foreign Minister Gutierrez, UN Permrep Rosenthal and Ambassador Alvarado.

17. (C) Comment: The decision on the Cuba vote will probably be made at the very last minute by President Portillo himself, and it is too soon to predict what factors will ultimately influence that vote (the Ambassador has engaged the Foreign Minister repeatedly on Cuba, most recently at the CICIACS human rights announcement on March 13). Guatemala's shift away from solid support for Israel may well be influenced by new Foreign Minister Gutierrez's pro-Palestinian sympathies. In the past Guatemala's votes for Israel have not been driven by requests from us, but rather were related to Israel's influence with the GOG. We will engage the Israeli Embassy in Guatemala to seek a common strategy for retaining GOG support for responsible votes on the Middle East, and would welcome the engagement of others to shore up Guatemala's traditional support for our positions on resolutions involving the Middle East.

HAMILTON